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GENEVA FOR CASSAYRE, MANSFIELD

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [UN](#) [KIRF](#) [EG](#)

SUBJECT: UPR REACTION: GOE DISPLEASED WITH THE U.S., ACTIVISTS  
CRITICIZE THE GOE

REF: 10 CAIRO 187; 09 CAIRO 2395; 09 CAIRO 2277; 09 CAIRO 1948  
09 CAIRO 1433

CLASSIFIED BY: Margaret Scobey, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

#### [¶](#)1. KEY POINTS

-- (C) GOE officials, including presidential advisor Soliman Awad, expressed displeasure with the number and the tone of U.S. recommendations at the February 17 UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Egypt's human rights record.

-- (C) The MFA noted it had accepted U.S. recommendations to lift the State of Emergency and replace it with a counterterrorism law

guaranteeing civil liberties, and to amend the legal definition of torture to be consistent with its obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture.

-- (C) Human rights activists criticized the GOE for "wrongly" rejecting U.S. recommendations, and "denying the facts of its human rights violations." Activists said they would follow up with the GOE on implementing recommendations although the GOE's commitments are non-binding.

-- (U) In local media coverage, independent outlets reported western countries' recommendations for the GOE to improve its human rights record, while the pro-government media emphasized GOE officials' responses to the recommendations.

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GOE Displeased with U.S. Recommendations

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¶2. (C) On February 24, presidential advisor Soliman Awad expressed concern to the Ambassador over the number of U.S. recommendations. Awad said the U.S. should focus on principles regarding religious freedom, not conversions and proselytizing which "makes Egyptians suspicious," he claimed. MFA Deputy Director for Human Rights Omar Shalaby told us the GOE was displeased with both the number and the tone of U.S. recommendations, "especially in light of recent bilateral cooperation in the UN Human Rights Council." He said that on instruction from the MFA, Ambassador Shoukry had conveyed this message to Vice President Biden's staff during a meeting to

discuss the Vice President's planned upcoming visit to Cairo, and the Egyptian Permanent Representative in Geneva had made these points to the U.S. Mission. Shalaby explained that although European countries made many of the same recommendations, the GOE was "less bothered" because it does not enjoy "the same level of cooperation with the Europeans."

¶3. (C) Shalaby disputed the U.S. recommendation to eliminate legal and bureaucratic restrictions on an individual's choice of religion, claiming that the obstacles are practical, not legal. We pushed back, noting court rulings against converts from Islam to Christianity. "The number of recommendations in itself is an issue," Shalaby noted, and he said the high number led to GOE speculation over U.S. motives. According to Shalaby, some in the GOE wondered whether the U.S. was under "external pressure" to be more "hawkish" on human rights in Egypt, or whether the U.S. intervention was "retribution" for U.S.-Egyptian differences over procedure during the 2009 Israel UPR. We told Shalaby that the recommendations reflect U.S. concern over a broad range of human rights issues in Egypt. (Note: The MFA's February 18 public statement did not mention U.S. recommendations. The statement welcomed the UPR process as an opportunity to demonstrate "Egypt's human rights progress," and rejected recommendations "by a few

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western countries" on "issues related to homosexuals," and marriage and divorce. End note.)

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"Healthy Aspects to the Process"  
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¶4. (C) Shalaby said the GOE believed it had accepted some important recommendations, such as those by the U.S. to replace the State of Emergency with a counterterrorism law guaranteeing civil liberties, and to ensure the legal definition of torture conforms with its obligations under the UN Convention Against Torture. He also noted the GOE accepted recommendations to combat religious discrimination. Shalaby was pleased with GOE interactions with Egyptian civil society during the UPR, saying that Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mufeed Shehab met twice with NGOs in Geneva.

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#### Activists Critical of GOE Performance

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¶5. (C) Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights Director Hossam Bahgat who attended the UPR assessed that the GOE delegation was "very weak on substance." According to Bahgat, the GOE was "wrong" in rejecting as inaccurate U.S. recommendations on arrests of activists under the Emergency Law, and restrictions on choosing religion. Bahgat wished the U.S. had explicitly noted GOE arrests of Muslim Brotherhood members. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies Director Moataz El-Feigery criticized the GOE for "denying facts," and demonstrating a lack of political will. He was pessimistic that the GOE would implement recommendations. El-Feigery believed Egyptian NGOs were able to successfully influence western countries' recommendations. He welcomed western countries' recommendations, but would have liked more discussion of GOE legal restrictions on presidential candidates (ref B details these restrictions).

¶6. (C) Human Rights lawyer Nasser Amin who attended the UPR called Arab League and Organization of the Islamic Conference support for Egypt "absurd." He believed these interventions were coordinated, due to their similarity in heaping praise on superficial GOE efforts. Amin said Minister Shehab told NGOs privately that he wanted to "open a new page with civil society," but Amin criticized Shehab for not "seriously addressing" the issues during the UPR session. President of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights Hafez Abu Seada said he will press the GOE to implement the recommendations it accepted, especially on amending the legal definition of torture. Abu Seada, who is also a member of the quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights, told us he asked Minister Shehab to involve civil society in implementing the recommendations.

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#### Local Media Coverage

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¶7. (SBU) The Egyptian media covered the UPR session and its aftermath in news stories, but provided little analytical commentary. The independent print press focused its reporting on western countries' recommendations, while the pro-government media covered the GOE's responses to the recommendations. A popular satellite television talk show aired comments from activists and opposition politicians criticizing the GOE for not engaging more

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with civil society in advance of the UPR, and for violating

Egyptians' human rights. Pro-government paper "Rose El-Youssef," which is close to the Interior Ministry, reported Minister Shehab saying Egypt would not accept recommendations conflicting with its "social and cultural context." "Rose El-Youssef" also reported that the MFA's February 18 statement rejected recommendations on "issues related to homosexuals."

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